

SOCIAL HERETICS IN THE SCOTTISH CHURCHES

By W. H. MARWICK, Esq., M.A.

DR. HECTOR MACPHERSON has demonstrated how some of the "Covenanters under Persecution," such as Alexander Shields, were led, in their opposition to the authority of the Crown, to express advanced democratic views, for which a foundation had been laid in the writings of George Buchanan, Samuel Rutherford and Sir James Stewart.¹ These sentiments were echoed and appealed to by the political reformers of the French Revolutionary period and by the Chartists of early Victorian days, who incidentally had their main support in the areas where the covenanting movement was strongest.

After the Revolution Settlement, however, the rebel strain was submerged as in England, and the Presbyterian Church, now established, became thirled to the support of vested interests. The Eighteenth Century tended to conservatism in political and social outlook, and any unorthodoxy was of a theological and rather speculative kind, like that of the Tory sceptic David Hume. Evangelicals and Moderates alike were lukewarm if not hostile to any doctrine or scheme of reform.

A solitary herald of revolt was Rev. Neil Douglas,² who was born at Glendarvit, Argyll, in 1750, the son of a farmer and miller who died young. His native tongue was Gaelic. He worked for a time as a shoemaker in Glasgow, and was able to take classes at the University there from about 1770, supporting himself latterly by tutoring. He was licensed by the Church of Scotland, but, owing to his aversion to Patronage, transferred his allegiance to the Relief Church and was admitted as a probationer in 1783, and shortly after ordained to a church in Cupar-Fife at a stipend of £70. He married Mary Anne Miller, daughter of the laird of Stair and a cousin of Henry Dundas, afterwards the dictator "Harry the Ninth," a sibship which stood him in good stead in later troubles. He attained repute as a preacher and was translated in 1793 to the West Port Church, Dundee. He served as Moderator of the Relief Synod, and

¹ H. Macpherson, *The Covenanters under Persecution* (1923) esp. ch. viii; *Alex. Shields, the Cameronian Philosopher* (1932); cf. D. Nobbs, *Scotland and England, 1560-1707*. (1952.)

² W. M. Kirkland: *The Impact of the French Revolution on Scottish Religious Life* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis).

took part in a missionary tour of the Highlands in 1796-97. He resigned in 1798 owing to an involved dispute with his congregation, who subsequently became "Independents" and a nucleus of the later Ward Chapel. He lived for some years in Edinburgh where he conducted a printing business and preached occasionally. He adopted Universalist views and carried on religious services first in Greenock, and from 1805 until his death in 1823 in the Andersonian Institute, John St., Glasgow. The contemporary Glasgow journalist Peter Mackenzie gives a vivid impression of him "in his huge brown wig and ancient habiliments . . . in stature rather small, and in person lean and lank and sallow complexioned."¹

His political views were first stimulated by his sympathy with the Colonials in the American struggle. He became implicated in the reform movement of the Revolutionary period and joined the Dundee "Friends of the Constitution," founded in September 1792.² He attended the third Scottish Convention in October 1793, and is said to have presided at some sessions; but he was among those who declined to participate in the "British" Convention which succeeded it and, by its extreme utterances and association with Irish rebels, evoked repression. Then and later he claimed to exercise a moderating influence: "The Reform for which I have always been an advocate did not express annual Parliaments or universal suffrage . . . but included reformation of morals, warning my hearers against the reformation of the French Jacobins."³ His marriage connexion "with some of the best families in Scotland" was perhaps more effective in saving him from the prosecution with which he was threatened. He did, however, at the age of 67, when, in Tom Johnston's alliterative phrase, "a dour deaf doited man,"⁴ incur trial on a charge of sedition. He was alleged, in the course of Sunday afternoon lectures on the Prophecies of Daniel, to have described George III as "worse in his mental and corporeal capacity than Nebuchadnezzar," and the Prince Regent as "a poor infatuated creature, over head and ears in love with jolly Bacchus." In his defence he professed that he would "not yield to any in loyal regard to our aged and venerable king." He continued: "It is often mentioned to my prejudice and as a ground of suspicion, that my hearers in general are of the lower classes. I own it and rejoice in the fact, as such were Christ's general hearers."⁵ He was acquitted, partly owing to the forensic abilities of his counsel Francis Jeffrey, but mainly because of the mutual contradictions of three town

¹ P. Mackenzie, *Reminiscences of Glasgow*, II, 446-58.

² H. W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution*, 91.

³ N. Douglas, *Address to Judges*, (1817), 33.

⁴ T. Johnston, *History of the Working Classes in Scotland*, 235.

⁵ N. Douglas, *ut supra.*, 26.

officers, who, in his own phrase, were "spies sent by Beelzebub from the Council Chambers to entrap him."¹

Besides political and theological pamphlets, he wrote a *Journal* of his Mission to the Highlands, a volume on the *African Slave Trade* (1792) in which he supported Wilberforce's campaign: and a quantity of verse, notably *A Monitorial Address to Great Britain*, a poem in six parts (1792) which in its dedication to the king, appeals to him to end "the slave trade, duelling, child murder, patronage and sinecure benefices."

An anonymous MS. note dated 1840, inscribed in one of his volumes, says: "he appears to have been a devout and zealous man—a hater of tyranny, civil and ecclesiastical, in every shape. He had suffered great privations and considerable persecution, but was honest and candid in all his affairs, and much and deservedly esteemed by those who knew him best."²

Chartism was long contemptuously dismissed by historians as, in Cockburn's phrase, a mere "sedition of the stomach," promoted by a few demagogues who "gathered unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort." Modern research demonstrates the existence of a well-organised movement, anticipating in many ways the modern Labour Party.³

The Chartists found a single advocate in the Established Church in Rev. Patrick Brewster. Born in 1788, he was youngest son of the Rector of Jedburgh Grammar School, and brother of the one-time Principal of Edinburgh University, the scientist Sir David Brewster. Licensed in 1817, he was next year presented to the second charge of Paisley Abbey, which he retained until his death in 1859.

Unlike his brother, he refused to come out at the Disruption and wrote in opposition to Disendowment and Voluntaryism. Among his objections to the Free Church were that "Free Churchmen were leaders in the crusade against the freedom of the pulpit," and that Dr. Chalmers upheld a reactionary attitude to social reforms, e.g. in the Poor Law controversy. Brewster agreed with his opponent Dr. Alison of Edinburgh as to the "great superiority of a fixed and legal over a voluntary and uncertain provision for the poor."⁴

Paisley was among the towns most affected by the nascent industrialism, where, as Cockburn remarked, the inhabitants were "always liable to be thrown out of employment by the stagnation of trade";⁵ it was a

¹ Mackenzie, *ut supra.*, 454.

² MS. note in *Lectures delivered in Paisley* (1805).

³ Cf. M. Hovell, *The Chartist Movement*; J. West, *History of the Chartist Movement*; L. C. Wright, *Scottish Chartism, etc.*

⁴ P. Brewster, *Chartist Sermons* (1843), 97. ⁵ H. Cockburn, *Journal*, ii, 2.

centre of the much depressed handloom weavers. His environment thus pressed "the condition of the people" on Brewster's notice. He was led to take an active part in the Chartist movement, but through his association with the "moral force" section which prevailed in Scotland, he came into sharp conflict with such champions of physical force as Feargus O'Connor and Dr. John Taylor. He supported the attempt of the Birmingham Quaker, Joseph Sturge, to ally the moderate Chartist with the Free Traders in the Complete Suffrage movement of 1842/43. At the abortive conference held to inaugurate it, he "distinguished himself by the length of his speech." He was brought to book before the church courts for sermons which offended the heritors and the commandant of the local barracks, but was ultimately "assoilzied" in December 1843.

The offending and other *Chartist and Military Sermons*, published in that year, constitute his chief literary remains. Therein he asserts the social duty of the church, which he illustrates from the Reformation. He affirms that the objection taken to "politics from the pulpit" "is not only inconsistent and at variance with the former practice of Christian ministers in this country, but is a real perversion and most unwarrantable mutilation of those important doctrines and examples which are set forth in the divine word for our instruction and example." He sums up the economic situation in a fashion Marxist in substance if far from Marxist in form: "God has filled the earth with his goodness, but his bounty is intercepted, and they by whose toil with the blessing of God it has been produced have received the smallest share of it . . . The British operative is as much at the mercy of his master as if he were a negro slave." The latter cause he also championed; the American slave-owners were "profligate and unprincipled democrats, deserters from the generous cause of human emancipation." The labours of religious men for the freedom of the slave afforded a precedent, he held, for condemning on religious grounds the tyranny of capitalism.

He is, with warrant, described as being of a "contentious disposition" and "his whole life was one continuous succession of exciting disputes."¹

His opponent, Dr. John Taylor, of a noted Ayrshire family, developed Evangelical views after his retirement from politics in ill-health, published religious verse, and was preparing for the ministry at the time of his early death (1842). Even in his unregenerate days he asserted Divine law as a sanction of popular rights, and Dr. L. C. Wright has identified a "Prayer" which he delivered in the course of his campaigns.²

¹ P. Brewster, *Chartist and Military Sermons* (1843); cf. "Patrick Brewster" (*Scottish Educational Journal*, Oct. 10, 1930).

² "Dr. John Taylor" (*Glasgow Herald*, Sept. 23, 1933); L. C. Wright, *Scottish Chartism*, 221-222.

The Scottish Chartists generally professed a Christian standpoint, and sometimes organised churches, where lay preachers officiated—e.g. at Glasgow and Paisley, Arbroath and Dundee. The latter were ministered to by the two Duncans, Abram and John, both of whom are accordingly sometimes designated "Reverend." The former first entered public life as a champion of voluntarism, in the ecclesiastical controversy of the 'thirties. These "Chartist Churches" were reincarnated in the "Labour Church" movement of the 'nineties, pioneered by John Trevor.¹ The stress laid on total abstinence by such Chartist spokesmen as John Fraser of the "True Scotsman" is noteworthy; one tangible result was the establishment by adherents of temperance hotels and coffee houses, of which those founded by Robert Cranston still preserve the name.²

A few Dissenting clergy were so far sympathetic as to allow the use of their buildings to Chartist and working class meetings; these sometimes avowed support of franchise reform without committing themselves to Chartism. Dr. John Kirk (1813-86) of Brighton St. Evangelical Union Chapel (demolished some years ago for the extension of the Royal Scottish Museum), was among them; his own heresy was primarily medical, and he was noted as an advocate of the "water cure," a Victorian panacea which gave rise to the Hydropathics, of which Neil Munro has given a humorous account; a critic opined that "porridge and prayers do not constitute a very suitable motto for a hostelry"; modern users of the name offer instead swimming pools and cocktail bars.³

Rev. Dr. Andrew Marshall (1781-1855), Voluntarist and ultra-Calvinist, Moderator in 1836 of the Secession Synod which he afterwards left, supported extension of the suffrage, and wrote on *The Duty of Attempting to Reconcile the Unenfranchised with the Enfranchised Classes*. (1841.)

Rev. Dr. John Ritchie (1783-1869), also of the Original Secession, and minister of Hope Park, Edinburgh, openly advocated universal suffrage, and took an active part in the Complete Suffrage Movement, to which a few other Scottish clergymen adhered. He spoke at the dedication of the Monument to the "Political Martyrs" of the 1790's, erected on the Calton Hill in 1844.

More definite support for Chartism came from Rev. Archibald Brown-ing, born in 1785, a student in the General Associate (anti-Burgher) Hall from 1812 to 1814, ordained in 1818 at Tillicoultry. There he sup-

¹ Research on this movement is in progress at New College; cf. D. Lowe, *Souvenirs of Scottish Labour*, 97-100; H. M. Pelling, *Origins of the Labour Party*.

² "Some Scottish Chartist Leaders" (*Glasgow Herald*, Feb. 10, 1934).

³ *Economic History*, Feb., 1937, pp. 420-21; cf. N. Munro, *I Remember*, ch. xvi.

plemented a meagre stipend by keeping a boarding school. He withdrew from the Secession Church in 1841, on the ground that "he cannot any longer preach under the bond of its standards." He continued his "Academy" until his sudden death in February 1858. He preached occasionally *inter alia* in the Edinburgh Unitarian Chapel and in a Chartist Church. He defended himself against critics in an Open Letter to Rev. Dr. Stark: "I am no advocate for founding churches on a political basis . . . I believe the Chartist churches are not so based." He had preached "at times and on subjects fixed and chosen by himself." "To the best of his knowledge," the Chartists were characterised by "honest and peaceable assertion of their civil and religious rights." Dr. Wright quotes a summary of his sermon which seems to substantiate his assertion: "He declared that the obstacles to the progress of popular freedom were, in that order, the Government, political economy, the middle class, literary men and the religious profession, the people themselves with their principle of selfishness."¹ He subscribed to the Complete Suffrage Movement. A contemporary described him as "Chartist, tee-totaller, peace advocate and friend of education."

A kindred spirit was Rev. Alexander Duncanson, who was one of nine students (including Fergus Ferguson) expelled from the Glasgow Independent Theological Academy in the early 'forties on a charge of heresy. He was chiefly responsible for publishing in 1844 a defence of the students in an *Address to Members of Congregational Churches*.

Meantime he joined the Evangelical Union, and was called to a pastorate in Alloa. Three years later he became colleague to Rev. A. C. Rutherford, a seceder from the Original Seceders, at Trinity Church, Falkirk; but a further secession occurred in the congregation, which led to his emigration to America in 1852. He practised medicine for some time at Sandusky, Ohio, and died in California in November 1887. He wrote a pamphlet on *The Political Rights of the People*, and served as a delegate to one of the later Conventions of the moribund Chartist movement (1851) and addressed public meetings on its behalf.²

The Radical tradition survived to some extent in the United Presbyterian Church, some of whose spokesmen were active in the support of Free Trade and in opposition to negro slavery. The demand for Disestablishment linked them with the more advanced wing of the Liberal Party, whose Scottish leader Duncan McLaren, long an Edinburgh M.P.,

¹ L. C. Wright, *Scottish Chartism*, 100.

² For Marshall, Ritchie, Browning & Duncanson, see H. U. Faulkner, *Chartism and the Churches* (Columbia University); W. McKelvie, *Annals of U.P. Church*; Small, *History of U.P. Congregations*; F. Ferguson, *History of the Evangelical Union*.

was a prominent United Presbyterian and Chairman of the Central Board of Dissenters, the constant ally of his brother-in-law John Bright.

An associate of Bright while holding a charge in Manchester was Dr. William Morison, who became an active clerical champion of the political Left during his long ministry at Rosehall, Edinburgh (1880-1914); he died in 1937 in his 94th year. He publicly supported the cause of the railwaymen in the famous strike of 1890, and was outspoken in his opposition to the Boer War. He contributed *con amore* to Scottish historical biography in his lives of *Andrew Melville* (1899); and of *Johnston of Wariston* (1904) in the *Famous Scots* series; for which he received a Doctorate of Divinity from St. Andrews. He regarded both as outstanding protagonists of civil liberty. In his *Milton on Liberty* (1909) he gives further forthright expression to his own political sentiments.¹

Donald Carswell, in his Stracheyesque sketches of *Brother Scots*,—that brilliant redaction of gossip and surmise into the semblance of historical research—seeks to establish an economic interpretation of Scottish ecclesiastical history, wherein the Church of the Disruption figures as the religious expression of the interests of the new industrial bourgeoisie, whose “first duty to God was to provide Scotland with a Free Church and to sign cheques accordingly.”² It is certainly true that Glasgow magnates played a prominent part in the councils of the Church. Lord Overtoun, pilloried by Keir Hardie, is a notorious example, while the similarity in personnel between the African Lakes Corporation of Nyasaland and the Livingstonia Committee of the Church has frequently been noted. The Church was influenced continually by the social teachings and theocratic predilections of Thomas Chalmers—for Marx the “arch-parson disciple of Parson Malthus.”³ Ecclesiastics such as Dr’s. Begg, Guthrie and Blaikie were active in promoting measures of social reform by philanthropic effort—e.g. housing, temperance, child welfare—but usually averse to drastic change in the social order.

At the end of the century, Rev. James Barr (1862-1949) commenced the pastorates in working class areas of Glasgow which ultimately led him, after assuming the leadership of the anti-Unionists in 1929, to prominence as a Labour Member of Parliament.

In the Established Church, Greyfriars in Edinburgh—whether or not because of its association with the first signing of the Covenant—maintained something of the rebel strain among its Victorian incumbents. Robert Wallace, D.D. (1831-99) succeeded Dr. Robert Lee (also an inde-

¹ *Scotsman*, 10th March, 1937.

² D. Carswell, *Brother Scots*, 14-15.

Karl Marx, *Das Capital* (Everyman Edn.), 680.

pendent in his opposition to University Tests and pioneering of Church instrumental music); but soon found a more congenial role as Professor of Ecclesiastical History (1877). This Chair he abandoned to follow the witty sceptic Alexander Russell in the editorship of the *Scotsman*. He ended his varied career as M.P. for East Edinburgh, helping to establish the Radical tradition of that constituency.

His successor at Greyfriars from 1877 to 1909, Dr. John Glasse (1848-1918) was one of the few clergy to profess adhesion to the nascent Christian Socialist movement of the 'eighties, when a University Social Reform Society, inspired by the teaching of Ruskin, influenced some of the younger ministers and divinity students. Glasse acted as host to Keir Hardie and other propagandists, and took the platform himself. He expressed his social views in a booklet on the Scots Poor Law and in pamphlets on *The Relation of the Church to Socialism*, *Modern Christian Socialism*, *Robert Owen* and similar topics. He also published in 1905 a "criticism and appreciation" of John Knox, emphasising his role as a political and social reformer.¹

Rev. Andrew Wellwood (1853-1919) brother-in-law of Principal Herkless of St. Andrews, and minister of Drainie from 1883, helped to organise the fishermen of the Moray coast on trade union lines in the Northern Sea Fisheries Association. He was author of a Life of Norman Macleod and of a volume of poems, published posthumously, with a memoir by Rev. John R. Duncan (1920); among the titles are: *Avarice King*, *Our Holy Willies*, and *To John Ruskin*.

Rev. Dr. Charles C. MacDonald (1837-1920) who ministered at St. Clement' Aberdeen from 1879 till his death, was a Radical exponent of land reform and opponent of Disestablishment. He preached the opening sermon at the Trade Union Congress held in Aberdeen in 1884. While disavowing Socialism, he urged independent working-class representation on public bodies, and supported the local candidature of H. H. Champion in 1892.²

Rev. Malcolm MacCallum (1852-1928), parish minister successively in Knoydart, Strontian and Muckairn (1886-1921), was noted as a champion of the Crofters, in the agitation of the 'eighties. He sat on the Deer Forest Commission appointed by Gladstone in 1882 and was elected to the County Council of Argyll. He contested the shire as a Labour nominee in 1920. He expounded the "social gospel" in a volume entitled *Religion*

¹ D. Lowe, *op. cit.*, 110-11; W. Stewart, *Keir Hardie*, 205; H. Scott, *Fasti*.

² *Fasti*, *ut sup.*; W. Diack, *The Trade Union Movement in Aberdeen*, 17, 25.

as *Social Justice* (1915), based on a series of public lectures. The keynote is struck in the first: "Christ was political and his work was the setting up of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Turn a deaf ear to the callous apologists of *laissez faire*, who live BY the Gospel; read the records of the old prophets who LIVED the Gospel." He also invokes the example of Knox whose "sermons were as political as the prophetic orations of Amos." "The present constitution of society in Britain" is condemned as "contradictory to the fundamental principle of Christianity as laid down by St. Peter." "Society is divided into classes," whereas "God has made men brothers, and no one is born richer or more honourable than another." "The Church of Scotland, according to her original constitution, exists to bring on to the earth the reign of righteousness and peace; to put down palaces and slums; and to provide happy homes and independent livelihood for all." One instance of its failure is manifested by the Highland Clearances: "the loveliest parts of the country are cleared of ploughmen and shepherds and turned into a wilderness to serve as a playground for cruel bandits who live by the sweat of the men who toil in jeopardy of their lives." "It is the duty of the Church so to shape our national laws and customs as to make it practicable for the mass of the people to lead Christian lives."

Finally reference may be made to some spokesmen of movements heretical in theology as well as in social outlook, outwith the main stream of Scottish religious life and its Presbyterian tradition.

Rev. George Gilfillan (1813-73), United Presbyterian minister of School Wynd, Dundee (itself a descendant of Neil Douglas' congregation), who had a considerable if ephemeral fame as a writer and lecturer on literary topics, was suspect of heresy. After his death, many of his congregation preferred to secede with his successor, Rev. David Macrae, when the latter was suspended on a similar charge. The Gilfillan Memorial Church was thus constituted as an independent unit; "the Presbyterian form of church government was retained with democratic modifications."

Macrae was born in 1837, third son of a United Presbyterian minister, and educated at the University of Glasgow; he was a minister of that denomination at Gourock until his call to Dundee. He was noted as an advocate of temperance, in the cause of which he wrote didactic tales such as *George Harrington* (1862) and *Dunvarlich* (1865) (for which he won a £100 prize from the Scottish Temperance League) and edited the League's *Journal*. He was the author of facetious sketches such as *The Courtship of Widow Freekirk and Mr. U. Peabody* and *The Trial of Dr. Norman Macleod for the Alleged Murder of Mr. Moses Law*—a skit on Sabbatarianism—published anonymously in 1867 with the title *Diogenes among the*

D.D.'s, "post free for 13 stamps." He did much public lecturing and was a member of Dundee School Board. He was an ardent champion of Scottish nationalism, founder and president of the Scottish Patriotic Association. He retired in 1897, and resided in Glasgow until his death ten years later.¹ His onetime assistant, Rev. A. H. Moncur Sime, afterwards minister of Holloway Congregational Church, London, was active in the nascent Labour movement, and contributed regularly to the *Labour Leader*.² He was author of a booklet on *The Literary Life of Edinburgh* (1898), which ends with a plea that "Scotland is ripe for the revival of . . . a national literature that shall embody the spirit that animates Scotsmen, the spirit that has made Scotland what it is."

Macrae's successor was Rev. Walter Walsh (1857-1931), Christian Socialist and pacifist, author of *Jesus in Juteopolis* (1906)—dedicated to the Mill and Factory Workers—in which, with evidence drawn from a recent local "Report on Housing and Industrial Conditions," he sought to depict a reincarnation in contemporary Dundee of an exponent of an advanced social gospel. His numerous other works included *The Moral Damage of War* (1902), and *The World Rebuilt* (1918), a series of lectures on post war reconstruction. He was a native of the city and a D.D. of Pittsburg. He sat on the City Council from 1906 to 1912. He travelled widely in connection with the International peace movement.

The Gilfillan Memorial Congregation had in 1886 adopted a constitution professedly based on "the Gospel of Christ"; in 1911, a new one was accepted, discarding this basis, and assuming the style of "the Church of Today." A dissentient minority took the matter to court, and in July 1912 Lord Cullen decided that the new constitution involved a fundamental departure outwith the power of the majority of the congregation, and declared those adhering to the older formula to be entitled to the church property. A *Scotsman* leader commented: "the Free Church case over again but seen through the wrong end of a telescope." Walsh then transferred his energies to London, and conducted the "Free Religious Movement" in the Theistic Church, Piccadilly, from January 1913 until his death in May 1931. Some of his addresses there—e.g. on Carpenter, Ruskin and Whitman—were published in 1920 as *The Endless Quest*. His supporters in Dundee were ministered to under a similar designation for five years by Rev. Henry Dawtrey, who migrated to Aberdeen in 1918.³

¹ D. Macrae, *Dunvarlich*, with *Memoir* by G. Eyre-Todd (1909).

² D. Lowe, *op. cit.*, 76.

³ *Who's Who*; *Scottish Law Times*, 1912, vol. ii, 263-67; *Scotsman*, July 25, 1912.

Unitarianism has commonly been associated with political as well as religious unorthodoxy, as is demonstrated by Rev. Principal Raymond Holt (sometime of Edinburgh) in his study of *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Reform*, which however has little to say of its influence in Scotland. Thomas Fyshe Palmer, a Cambridge graduate, founded a Unitarian chapel in Dundee in 1784, and was one of the "Political Martyrs" who suffered under Lord Braxfield.

Always a small body in Scotland, Unitarianism was represented in the public life of the mid nineteenth century chiefly by a layman, George Hope of Fenton Barns, East Lothian, unique among tenant farmers as an opponent of the Corn Laws and champion of Radicalism.

Towards the end of the century, two clergymen, Revs. Alex. Webster and Henry Williamson, were outstanding in their social activities.

Webster was born at Old Meldrum, Aberdeenshire, in 1840, of mixed Free Church and Secessionist ancestry. He worked in Glasgow from an early age. His spiritual pilgrimage "from Calvinism to Unitarianism" (as he described it in an autobiographical sketch with that title) culminated in his entry into the ministry of the latter body at Paisley in 1872. He held pastorates subsequently in Perth, Glasgow and Kilmarnock, but his main field was in Aberdeen, from 1884 to 1891 and again from 1895 to 1910. He died in 1918.

He entered the political sphere through the Henry George Land Campaign and became Chairman of the Scottish Land Restoration League in the early 'eighties. He was a member of the Social Democratic Federation and of the Fabian Society, and took an active part in the conduct of the Scottish Labour Party formed by Keir Hardie in 1888; he was appointed a Vice-Chairman and presided over its fourth conference in 1893, just before it was merged in the Independent Labour Party.¹ Many leading Socialists were among his guests. He edited *The Ploughshare*, "a journal of radical religion and morality" (c. 1888). He was elected to the Aberdeen School Board at the head of the poll in 1897, and served as Chairman. He had already (1889) inaugurated the Children's Fresh Air Fortnight scheme. He was known as an open-air speaker on the Broad Hill; he claimed to have addressed 300 such meetings. He was a stalwart opponent of the Boer War, and had his windows smashed, as well as being involved in a disturbance at a "pro-Boer" meeting in the Trades Hall, when the military were called out and the Riot Act was read. He was a non-smoker, teetotaler and vegetarian, and an advocate of Women's Suffrage. He was a prolific writer and contributed regularly

¹ D. Lowe, *op. cit.*, 112, 153.

to the press. Some of his lectures and articles were republished, e.g., *Burns and the Kirk* (1888) and *The Political Position of Labour* (1893), a plea for a separate Labour Party. In *Religious Socialism; the Upper Goal for the Bottom Dog*, he criticised the secularist environmentalism of Blatchford as expressed in *Not Guilty; a Defence of the Bottom Dog*. He also wrote *Memories of His Ministry* (1913) and *Theology in Scotland* (1915), and, under the name of "Mark Meldrum," a novel entitled *Knox Rannoch's Prophecy*.

Webster's short pastorate at Kilmarnock (1891-95) was at Clerk's Lane Church, founded by Dr. James Morison. His predecessor there was Rev. James Forrest (1880-90), during whose ministry it had in 1887 seceded from the Evangelical Union and become a "Free Christian Church." Forrest circulated monthly letters expounding the principles of Christian Socialism.¹ He was for some years lecturer to the McQuaker Trust for the promotion of Unitarianism in Scotland, and afterwards lived in Sale, Cheshire. He published in 1896 a volume of his addresses as *Religion and the Scientific Spirit*. That on "Christian Principles and Social Problems" asserts that the chief problems are those of "unequal distribution of the means of subsistence . . . and of production, . . . instituted by a system that has become positively unchristian in its theories, precepts and requirements. . . . It deduces its main doctrine from the fundamental proposition that personal interest is the most powerful motive of human action. . . . What is primarily required is, not the moralisation of any particular section of the community, but the introduction of a worthier motive of action and a nobler conception of the purpose of social life."

Henry Williamson was born in 1839 at Godalming, and emigrated to U.S.A. in 1857, where he worked as a carpenter. He became an active member of the Universalist Church of the Good Shepherd, Norwich, Connecticut, and was encouraged by its pastor to enter the ministry. He returned to England in 1861, and trained for three years under Dr. John Beard who conducted what became the Unitarian Home Missionary College. Having preached in Dundee he was invited to revive the congregation founded there by Fyshe Palmer, and in 1866 was inducted to the charge, where he ministered for nearly sixty years until his death in October, 1925. Services were conducted in the Exchange Hall, Castle Street, and his early ministry met with much opposition; on one occasion he was mobbed and stunned. A chapel was erected in 1870.

Williamson instituted free evening classes, particularly in domestic economy. He was thus led to interest himself in the conditions of the

¹ Ross, *History of Congregational Independency in Scotland*, 241, 251, 268.

workers, largely female, in the local linen and jute factories. He helped to organise relief in the period of unemployment in the late 'seventies, and took part in a strike meeting in 1885. This resulted in the formation of a Mill and Factory Operatives Union, of which he served as President till 1917, despite occasional criticisms of his autocracy. The Union claimed to have obtained considerable increase in wages, and aimed at peaceful negotiation ; at its semi-jubilee in 1911 it had £12,000 in hand.

He sat as a Labour representative on the Parochial Board, and once achieved press notoriety (under the caption "Strong Language by a Minister") by complaining that a woman applicant "might starve or go to the devil for all the Board cared." After several unsuccessful attempts, he was elected also to the School Board in 1891, and promoted the provision of meals and books, and the introduction of evening classes and manual training. Described as "one of the most genial of men, . . . a student of books as well as of human nature," he ultimately attained great popularity and esteem, and in the year before his death received a public presentation in recognition of his services to the city.

In the twentieth century, much for which these pioneers stood has been accepted in the gradual evolution of the welfare state, and advocates of further advance on similar lines now receive sufficient official endorsement to be no longer fitly classed as social heretics, so the time now reached seems appropriate for a conclusion.

[I am much indebted to Rev. Dr. J. A. Lamb, Librarian of New College, for access to theses and publications, especially those of Rev. Neil Douglas, in the College Library ; and for much information regarding Revs. Alex. Webster and Hy. Williamson to their sons, Mr. Charles Webster, Aberdeen, Mr. Leslie Webster, Glasgow, and Mr. Edwin Williamson, Aberdeen ; and to Rev. Principal Holt, Manchester, and Rev. Gordon Beverley, Aberdeen. —W. H. M.]

